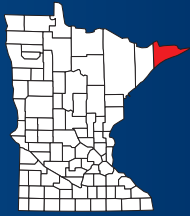




COOK COUNTY SCHOOLS

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 166

2023-24 FALL DISTRICT NEWSLETTER



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From the Superintendent's Desk:

Fisherman's Picnic is behind us now and that means it's time to kick off fall sports and preparations to launch another school year!! It's been a busy summer with youth sports, fitness programs, sports camps, summer school, parking lot maintenance, cleaning and painting, the installation of new score boards in the high school gym, and teachers working on curriculum, the district PBIS program, and lots of professional development. It'll be especially busy this fall for Cook County teachers as we learn about and implement new assessment platforms and new math curriculum.



Chris Lindholm
Superintendent

Community Input Wanted Regarding Facilities & Grounds Improvements

This fall Cook County Schools will be engaging in a comprehensive facilities & grounds study, along with an educational adequacy assessment and a demographics study, to understand and identify areas of needed improvement. This is being done to ensure we are fulfilling our mission and are best aligned to serve our students and community. The process will include multiple input sessions with community members, students, and staff with the goal of identifying and prioritizing possible facility and/or grounds updates. The district is positioned to retire some of the debt from previous bond referendums at the end of 2024 making it an opportune time to consider reinvesting in facility updates and possible educational improvements. Please stay tuned for upcoming opportunities to share your thoughts about priorities for improvements to Cook County Schools facilities and grounds!!

OPEN HOUSE!!

All families are invited to Cook County Schools fall open house on Wednesday, August 30th 3:30 - 6:30pm. This is the best opportunity to meet teachers, put items in lockers and desks, learn schedules, and get questions answered! A special welcome to students and families that are new to Cook County Schools - we look forward to meeting you!!!



2023-24 School Meals and Free & Reduced Meal Forms

While MN is providing one free breakfast and one free lunch each day for all students, it is still very important for families to submit an **Application for Educational Benefits** if your family might qualify and has not been qualified through direct certification. Qualifying families have access to discounted fees for activities, some materials, and even drivers education!! Please turn in filled out applications to the school office.

Free school meals only includes one approved breakfast and one approved lunch. Families will be charged for any extra items and for ala-carte options as the school district is not reimbursed for extras. Please use the **Infinite Campus Parent Portal** to deposit funds into your student's meal account or submit a check to the main office.

Welcome to New Staff!!

Welcome aboard to the following new staff members:

Josh Belanger, principal - Mr. Belanger started as the school principal on July 1st after working as a special education teacher and as an assistant principal for 18 years in both the Anoka-Hennepin School District and Benilde St. Margaret's High School. He and his wife Katie have two children who will be attending school at Sawtooth Elementary.

Wendy Holden, 2nd grade teacher - Wendy is joining the Cook County team as a 2nd grade teacher and brings well over 20 years of teaching experience with her from St. Louis Park, Stillwater, and Woodbury. She is excited to be making Grand Marais her new home and community!

Kendra Osgood, 2nd grade teacher - Kendra is moving into a second grade teaching position after working as a paraprofessional and interventionist at Sawtooth Elementary for the past five years! She is currently finishing up her teaching licensure and brings a wealth of great experience to the classroom.

Sarah Anderson, secondary math - Sarah is excited to be joining the Cook County team as a secondary math teacher. Sarah brings eleven years of experience teaching mathematics in Georgia, South Washington County, Columbia Heights, and most recently in Ely.

Catherine Meier, bus driver - Catherine is joining the amazing team of Cook County bus drivers and has two children attending school in the district!

Michael Zimmerman, Ojibwe language & culture teacher - Michael is joining the Cook County team after many years of teaching Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Ojibwe culture in Wisconsin at the preschool through higher education levels! He is excited to make a positive impact in the Grand Portage and Cook County communities!



Strategic Plan Updates

The district vision established by the school board in May of 2022 reads:

Cook County Public Schools is recognized as a district that prepares students to be engaged citizens who make a positive impact by:

- ▶ Inspiring curiosity, creativity, empathy and a passion for lifelong learning
- ▶ Creating rigorous and enriching learning experiences
- ▶ Cultivating reflection, an understanding of historical context, and a diverse world view
- ▶ Preparing students with self-awareness and strong communication and problem solving skills
- ▶ Meeting the needs of each student in a safe and nurturing environment

Two key strategies the district is focused on as we work towards actualizing this vision are the implementation of the **High Reliability Schools** (HRS) framework of continuous improvement and the implementation of the **Advancement Via Individual Determination** (AVID) program. HRS provides a five level research based framework for school leadership teams to set goals within based upon improvement strategies with the highest “return on investment.” Last fall and winter the staff was surveyed about the key leading indicators for levels 1, 2 and 3 and the leadership teams established and prioritized improvement goals in all three levels. A significant amount of curriculum development was done throughout the year (level 3), many teachers engaged in lesson studies and instructional rounds (level 2), and teacher teams implemented strategies at all grade levels to ensure Cook County Schools is a safe and supportive learning environment for each and every student (level 3). This was the first year of implementing the HRS improvement framework in Cook County Schools so a significant amount of energy was focused on learning and developing new protocols throughout the district.

The AVID program was launched in Cook County Schools as a direct strategy to address all five components of the district vision statement and as a means to respond to learning loss from the





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pandemic by providing students with direct instruction on effecting learning processes and strategies. The AVID curriculum teaches strategies focused on writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading to support student academic growth in all content areas. Beginning in 2023-24, the program will serve as the “glue” for Cook County Middle School students as they participate in elective classes and exploratory field trip days and build their personalized learning plans in preparation for high school and beyond. Students will engage in interest inventories to help map out their learner profiles, explore careers and post-secondary options, and identify learner pathway options for high school and post-secondary decisions. The ultimate goal is to help students be successful in all of their classes and to help them make good decisions about classes, activities, or programs to participate in and how those decisions connect to options - or

not - later in life. Tied directly to the district vision statement established by the school board, AVID addresses cultivating reflection, creating rigorous and enriching learning experiences, inspiring curiosity, preparing students with self-awareness and strong communication and problem solving skills, and meeting the needs of each student.

Safety & Security

Anyone that reads or listens to national news knows that times have definitely changed. Threats of violence in schools, cyber and ransomware attacks, swatting calls, and acts designed to cultivate fear and distrust in systems seem to be more and more prevalent. We have been fortunate in Cook County Schools to avoid most of the threats and drama that have plagued other school districts and communities, but we are also just as vulnerable as any other district. Please be assured that the Cook County Schools team works hard to ensure we are as prepared as possible to handle emergency situations and will continue to do required and routine drills along with working in partnership with local law enforcement and emergency management teams.

In Cook County we are blessed to live in a small, remote community in which people care for one another. Our greatest asset for keeping our schools safe and welcoming is being aware and communicating proactively about any concerns. Please make sure to reach out to school leaders with any concerns or information and don't simply assume people are in the know about any particular issue. We are so grateful for the many ways Cook County folks work together to bring up children in a safe, welcoming, and loving community!



Elective Opportunities & Partnerships in Cook County

Cook County students are fortunate to participate in many elective opportunities including Culinary Arts, Visual Art, Instrumental Music, Vocal Music, Industrial Arts, Spanish, Ojibwe, Outdoor Environmental Education, Physical Education & Fitness and benefit from partnerships with the Art Colony, North House Folk School, Grand Portage, Friends of the Boundary Waters, Sugar Loaf Cove, the Grand Marais Library and so many more! These ongoing efforts provide students with a wide range of opportunities to engage in active learning and to help them prepare for making their post-secondary plans. Thank you to the Cook County community for supporting the district and the students in so many ways!!

i-Ready Math Curriculum

As a result of a year of research, piloting, and vetting multiple products and vendors, the k-6 team of teachers made the decision to adopt new math curriculum resources as an important step towards improving math achievement. Beginning this fall, teachers and students will be working with **i-Ready math materials, platforms, and learning resources published by Curriculum Associates**. Sawtooth Elementary and Cook County Middle School teachers are looking forward to helping each student meet their growth and achievement goals in mathematics!





FastBridge & STAR

Over the past two years a task force of Cook County Schools teachers has been reviewing the standardized assessment practices of other MN districts in hopes of decreasing the time students spend taking standardized tests while also improving the information provided to guide instruction and lesson planning. The data from the NWEA MAP and aimsweb assessments has been used as a screening tool to track progress and assess for dyslexia, for diagnostic analysis and progress monitoring for students engaged in interventions, and for general lesson planning for groups of students.

The result of the two year review process was a unanimous decision to transition to the **FastBridge assessment suite** for grades k-5 and the **STAR assessment suite** for grades 6-12 which are both a product of Renaissance Learning. Both products provide comparable data to past assessments while providing better options for progress monitoring student growth, implementing interventions and reducing the time students will need to spend taking tests. Thank you to the task force of teachers that worked so hard over the past two years researching these options!!

Community Education: Fall youth sports registration for football and volleyball are online. Click on our community education tab on our website to learn more about each sport.

www.cookcountyschools.org/page/community-education

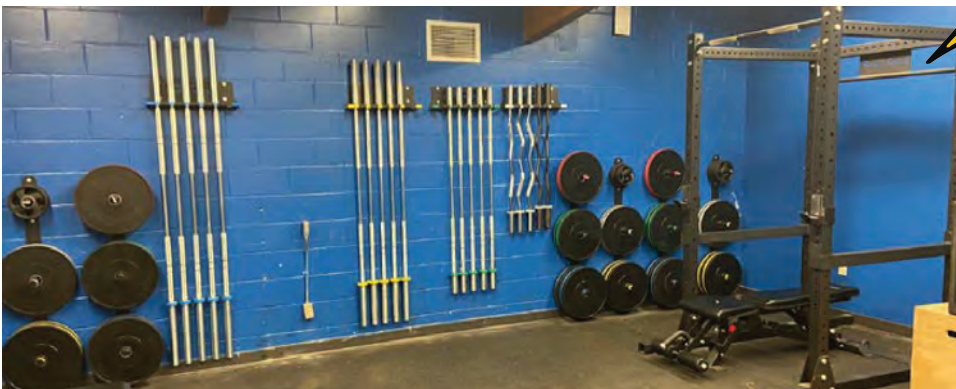
Early Childhood: Early Childhood screenings should take place once your child has turned three. Contact Krista Olson to set up your screening appointment, krolson@isd166.org or 218-387-2271 ex 401

We have a few spots left in our 3's/4's class with Ms. Mari. Enrollment paperwork is on our website under the Schools tab. **www.cookcountyschools.org/page/preschool**



Fitness Center

A HUGE thank you to the many businesses, families and organizations that donated funds for weight lifting and fitness equipment this past spring!!! The equipment was already put to great use this summer thanks to our dedicated fitness coaches that volunteer countless hours to help our students. Recognition banners will be up soon!!





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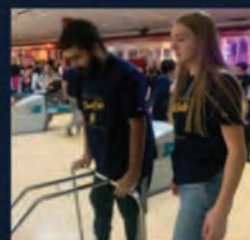
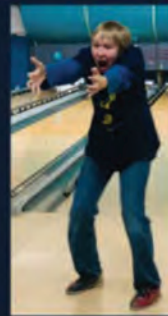
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